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# Assembly California Legislature



**WILLIAM W. MONNING**  
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July 27, 2009

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger  
Governor  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Mary-Ann Warmerdam, Director  
California Department of Pesticide Regulation  
1001 I Street, PO Box 4015  
Sacramento, CA 95812-4015

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger and Director Warmerdam:

We are writing to express our serious concern over the possible registration of methyl iodide as a soil fumigant in California.

While we recognize the challenges faced by members of the agricultural community who have relied on methyl bromide as a soil fumigant, we believe it is critical to find both efficacious and safe alternatives. In past years, the United States government has authorized exemptions from the requirements of the Montreal Protocols to limit and eventually eliminate the use of ozone-depleting chemicals including methyl bromide. While we believe it is important to honor and enforce the objectives of the Montreal Protocols, the identification and selection of alternatives must be based on a balancing test that measures potential health and environmental risks. While recognizing the economic and production interests of growers of certain crops, we strongly encourage the continued exploration of safe alternatives.

With respect to the proposed registration of methyl iodide, there is overwhelming scientific evidence of potential harm from exposure to this chemical—a chemical so toxic that scientists handling very small quantities in a laboratory typically utilize a ventilation hood. In contrast, if registered by the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) as a soil fumigant, methyl iodide would be applied in agricultural fields at rates up to 175 pounds per acre. Since this volatile compound spreads as a gas, there is a high probability that it will drift from application sites, contaminating neighboring residents and farm workers in nearby fields.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) permitted the use of methyl iodide last year despite the serious concerns of environmentalists, farm workers, rural residents and a group of over 50 eminent scientists, including five Nobel Laureates. These scientists sent a letter to the EPA stating, "As chemists and physicians familiar with the effects of this chemical, we are concerned that pregnant women and the fetus, children, the elderly, farm workers and other

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger  
July 20, 2009  
Page Two

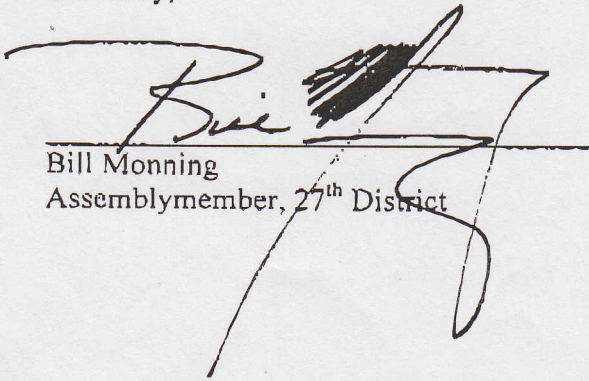
people living near application sites would be at serious risk if methyl iodide is permitted for use in agriculture." The letter goes on to explain, "Because of methyl iodide's high volatility and water solubility, broad use of this chemical in agriculture will guarantee substantial releases to air, surface waters and groundwater, and will result in exposures for many people. In addition to the potential for increased cancer incidence, EPA's own evaluation of the chemical also indicates that methyl iodide causes thyroid toxicity, permanent neurological damage, and fetal losses in experimental animals." The letter concludes, "It is astonishing that the Office of Pesticide Programs is working to legalize broadcast releases of one of the more toxic chemicals used in manufacturing into the environment."

We were pleased by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation's decision to consider the registration of methyl iodide through an open and public process that promised to include an independent scientific review of DPR's risk assessment and ample opportunity for public input. Therefore, we were surprised to learn that your administration has begun to explore the possibility of "fast tracking" the approval of methyl iodide through an abbreviated process that could make it available for use as early as this fall. Considering the well-documented health and environmental risks methyl iodide poses, the prospect that your administration would jettison a careful, public and scientifically-driven approach is, at best, alarming.

The draft risk assessment prepared by DPR's own staff details the serious health risks of methyl iodide exposure. DPR toxicologists point out that methyl iodide can disrupt maternal and fetal thyroid function, explaining that because iodide is concentrated in the mammary gland, California's nursing infants would receive excess iodide through breast milk if their mothers were exposed. In conclusion, the risk assessment finds that "air concentrations estimated for human exposure to [methyl iodide] under the proposed use conditions will result in significant risks for workers and the general population, with anticipated exposures up to 3,000 times the acceptable dose for some proposed soil fumigation use scenarios." (Emphasis added.)

The workers and residents of California's rural agricultural communities have too often been unnecessarily exposed to highly toxic pesticides in the name of agricultural efficiency and economic gain. We urge you to place the health and well being of our state's residents ahead of calls for expediency from the pesticide and agriculture industry. You have the opportunity to move California forward toward much safer methods of pest control. We strongly believe that methyl iodide has no role to play in building a secure, viable and healthy agricultural economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Sincerely,



Bill Monning  
Assemblymember, 27<sup>th</sup> District

Mark Leno  
Senator, 3<sup>rd</sup> District

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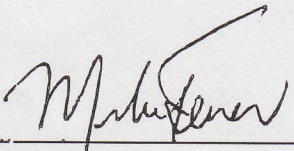
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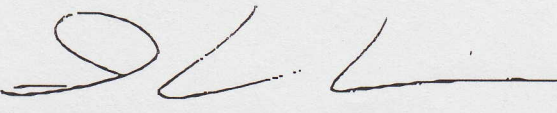
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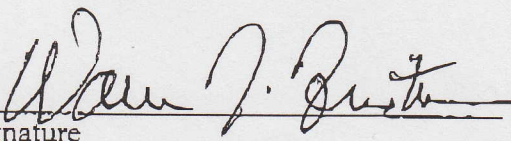
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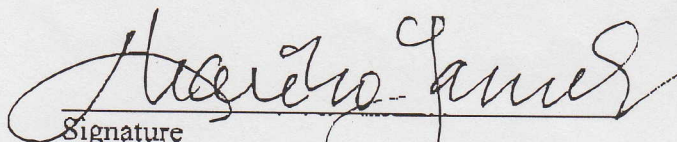
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